

For Council: 10 March 2025 APPENDIX 3

Lichfield City Council

Minutes of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee Meeting held in the Moulton Room, Guildhall at 10:30am on Tuesday 25 February 2025

PRESENT:

Representing Lichfield City Council: Councillor A Hughes, (Chair), and Councillors J Anketell, J Christie, J Eagland, R Yardley, and E Strain.

In Attendance:

T Briggs (Town Clerk)
K Biddle (Museums & Heritage Officer)
F Benson (Museum Support Officer)
J Winterton (Johnson Society Representative)
P Jones (Johnson Society Representative)
A Thompson (Honorary Member)

Apologies:

Councillor M Field

Copies of all the documents referred to in these minutes are available to members on request to the Town Clerk or Museums and Heritage Officer.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED: *That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th November 2024 confirmed as a correct record.* [Minutes adopted by Council on 16th December 2024].

3. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – FORWRAD PLAN

The Committee considered the Museums and Heritage Officer's (MHO) SJBMM Forward Plan 2025-28.

(4.4) Cllr R Yardley asked whether the age group data presented in the visiting audience overview included school visit numbers. The MHO explained that these numbers exclude school groups and instead reflect general visitor data. The age group data is a good indication of who SJBMM's audience are and what they need.

(3.2 aim 4) P Jones and J Winterton asked about the relocation of the Blum Library. The MHO stated that this concept dates back a few years, asserting that this was one of the priorities laid out by the former MHO. She explained that the Blum Library was a donated collection of books with a pot of money assigned to it. The MHO believes that the Parlour is a poor location for it, so the aim would be to reorganise and combine the libraries, and therefore to reinterpret rooms.

(3.2) Cllr J Eagland asked how the Birthplace was advertising activities and events. The MHO explained that the Birthplace advertises its upcoming events via the website, social media, and through leaflets. Cllr J Eagland then asked about advertising for private events and building hires. The MHO stated that the Birthplace would not be able to accommodate that sort of hiring because of limited space and access to facilities (i.e. no public toilet or catering facilities on site). The Birthplace is, however, available for smaller bookings, such as the Johnson Society Chair Ceremony. It was reiterated that the Guildhall would be the most suitable site for venue hires. The MHO, referencing her previous experience, explained that overall costs and loss in revenue to put on a larger hire would outweigh the benefits. P Jones added that there should be limitations on certain activities due to the building's listed status.

(3.2 aim 3) P Jones asked if the Wood Library, being an incredible resource, is likely to be more visible to visitors in plans to develop the Birthplace. The MHO stated that the Wood Library is already open to researchers, but that she would like to expand this to visitors at some point. However, with collections items being stored there and the room being the only dedicated space for volunteers to use, this would have to be considered as part of the larger reinterpretation plan.

(4.4) P Jones also highlighted visitor figures. The figures indicate an increasing number of visitors from outside of Lichfield; P Jones asked if there would be anything done to increase the number of visitors from within Lichfield. The MHO explained that these figures are very positive, and that ultimately the goal at the Birthplace is to appeal to a variety of audiences. The Birthplace aims to expand its local audience by holding events and collaborating with external community groups.

(5. aim 1) Cllr J Christie praised the document for generally being strong and comprehensive. Cllr Christie wondered if some parts could be made more specific - for example, how the document states that SJBm will maximise volunteer input but does not mention how it will do that. The MHO explained that volunteer input will be increased through new roles which will be advertised on the new website. The MHO explained that while volunteers are a valuable and incredible resource, there are limitations as to how many new volunteers the Birthplace can recruit due to staffing capacity and the level of support volunteers require. The MHO suggested that the aim could be made more measurable and specific through a focus on volunteer skills development.

(4.9) J Winterton asked about the wording around opening hours, and whether it would be better to state that the museum can sometimes be closed outside of Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day, due to events such as the Lichfield Food Festival. A Thompson agreed with J Winterton, also suggesting that the Birthplace should state that it has additional closures. The MHO stated that closures can be unpredictable (like the closure of the Birthplace in March and April of 2024). Cllr A Hughes agreed with the MHO, reaffirming that the Birthplace aims to be open as much as possible and that the current wording allows leeway.

(4.3) A Thompson questioned whether the 11 volunteers should be included within the 2.7 FTE staff. The MHO stated that volunteers are different from paid staff and that should be clearly defined in those numbers. The MHO said that Lichfield City Council employ 2.7FTE staff to run and operate the Birthplace, and that volunteers are recruited in a voluntary capacity, meaning that they are unpaid. A Thompson asked about the wording around volunteers, and suggested the document should be amended to say 'unpaid volunteers', but this was challenged by Cllr A Hughes who believed that the Accreditation assessors would understand the distinction between paid staff and volunteers.

(4.13) In reference to the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis section of the Forward Plan, Cllr A Hughes stated that the Birthplace had been modest, and that some of the points had been partially achieved. The MHO explained that the Johnson Society and Johnson's worldwide fame would be added as points to the strengths section of the SWOT analysis.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan, as amended following discussions above, be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the amended SJBm Forward Plan 2025-28 be adopted.

4. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – ACCESS POLICY

The Committee considered the SJBM Access Policy.

(3.) J Winterton asked about how the Birthplace was going to make the collections and information stored on the upper floors of the building accessible. The MHO explained that this has partly been done with virtual tours (available on SJBM's website and on the tablet in the Bookshop), however these could be improved upon and that she would like to expand the Birthplace's accessibility in the future.

(5) J Winterton revisited the wording around the opening hours, again suggesting that it may need to be amended to reflect closures outside of the expected ones in December and January. Cllr A Hughes stated that the document was good, honest, and imaginative in terms of mitigation.

RESOLVED: That the Access Policy be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the SJBM Access Policy be adopted.

5. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The Committee considered the SJBM Collections Development Policy.

(10) Cllr J Christie questioned whether the Birthplace should mention something about obtaining items of good provenance to strengthen the section on acquisitions. The MHO said that this could be added.

(4.1) J Winterton pointed out that the section that describes Johnson's circle of friends erroneously includes Josiah Wedgwood. The MHO said she will remove Wedgwood from this section.

(12) J Winterton asked the MHO to define what biological and geological material was in the context of museum practice, and whether this impacted the museum's collection. The MHO explained that biological materials relate to things like specimens and geological materials include things like minerals and rocks. The MHO confirmed that this section is not applicable to the Birthplace, and that the inclusion of the biological and geological section is standard and required for the Accreditation Return.

RESOLVED: That the Collections Development Policy, as amended following discussions above, be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the Collections Development Policy be adopted.

6. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY

The Committee considered the SJBM Care and Conservation Policy.

(8) J Winterton asked what a working collection item was. The MHO explained that these are usually objects that are used for demonstrative purposes, such as waterwheels and drop stamps. The MHO advised that the museum does not have any working items.

RESOLVED: That the Care and Conservation Policy be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the Care and Conservation Policy be adopted.

*The MHO to circulate the finalised versions of this suite of documents
to JBAC members as soon as is practicable.*

7. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the calendar of meetings as Thursday 1 May 2025 at 10.30am in the Moulton Room, Guildhall. However, the Committee has previously stated that the documentation to be considered at this meeting be circulated via email in due course, with a meeting taking place if needed. The Town Clerk had provisionally set the next JBAC meeting as 4th November 2025, but this was subject to confirmation by Council at its March meeting as part of wider consideration of the 2025/26 meetings calendar.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS

THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11:15am